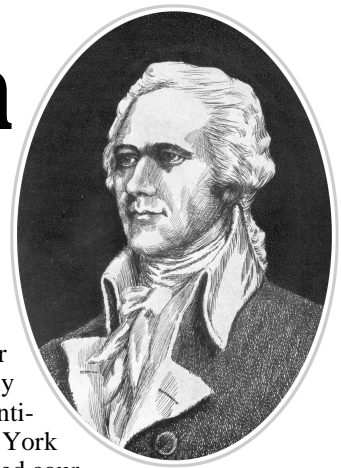


Alexander Hamilton

An American Statesman and Artilleryman



The new Hamilton Award for the Best Army National Guard (ARNG) Battery, created in 2002, is named after American Statesman and Continental Army Artilleryman Alexander Hamilton. (See the related stories “Best Battery Awards: Knox Award Reinstated and Hamilton Award Created in 2002” and “B/1-147 FA Wins 2002 Hamilton Award for Best ARNG Battery” in this edition.)

Alexander Hamilton was an outstanding artillery battery commander and a skilled cohort of General George Washington during the Revolutionary War, helped frame the US Constitution and served as the nation’s first Secretary of the Treasury.

Alexander Hamilton was born in 1757 to an impoverished Scottish family in the West Indies. At the age of 15, he came to New York to be educated, and although many of his instructors and friends at King’s College (now Columbia University) were Loyalist, he promptly espoused the Colonists’ cause. Foreseeing the conflict ahead, he studied artillery tactics and military maneuvers and joined a volunteer corps called “Hearts of Oak” that may be one of the earliest officer training camps.

In 1776, the New York Provincial Congress raised an artillery company to defend the colony. Because he was only 19, the congress gave Hamilton an examination to determine if he could command the company, which he passed, taking command of the Provincial Company of the Artillery of New York that same year. A nephew of General George Washington saw Hamilton’s attention to drilling his men in the field and commended him to Washington.

Hamilton’s Battery became the first to fire at the British during the Revolutionary War on 12 July 1776 at Fort George on Manhattan Island. After a series of serious engagements in which Hamilton repeatedly demonstrated his leadership and artillery skills, he distinguished himself by protecting Washington’s Army in a desperate retreat. On 1 December, he

placed his guns to guard the rear of Washington’s sick and poorly armed 3,000 soldiers as the Continental Army retreated from New York into New Jersey. Hamilton showed courage and skill at directing his fire to stop the enemy’s advance.

Washington, after receiving reinforcements, crossed the Delaware River on Christmas night and attacked General William Howe’s Hessian troops at Trenton, New Jersey. In spite of the 10-hour river crossing followed by a nine-hour march in a snowstorm, General Washington took the Hessians by surprise and, with the help of the deadly effects of Hamilton’s Battery, defeated them, attaining his first victory in the Revolutionary War.

Noted for his bravery at the Battle of Trenton, Captain Alexander Hamilton again came to the attention of General George Washington. General Washington ended Hamilton’s artillery career in March 1777, making Hamilton his aide-de-camp, beginning the long association of the two American patriots and leaders. Alexander Hamilton was 20 years old.

Hamilton was not happy as a staff officer and was determined to return to command of troops. During the last campaign of the war, General Washington acquiesced and gave Hamilton command of a corps of light infantry, which he ably led in the last assault at the Siege of Yorktown.

After the Battle of Yorktown, Alexander Hamilton resigned from the Army to turn his skills to serving the new nation. He went on to be appointed a member of Congress and help frame and ratify the US Constitution. In 1789, he was appointed the first Secretary of the Treasury, establishing national fiscal policies and instituting the Bank of the US.

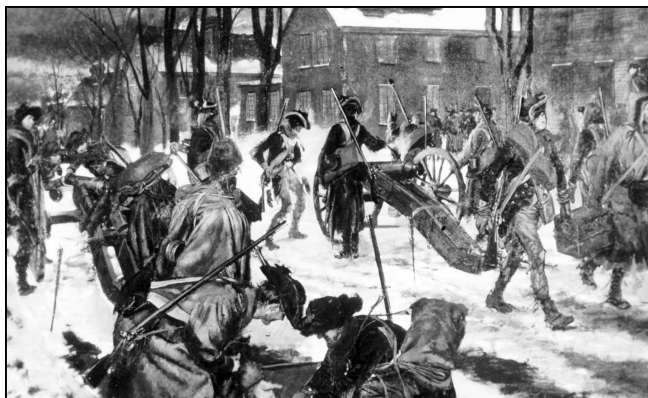
Some 20 years after the Battle of Yorktown, he appears on the rolls of the Army as a major general during the war with France and briefly served as the Commander-in-Chief after Washington’s death in December 1799. Hamilton resigned the position in June of 1800.

Alexander Hamilton and Henry A. Knox influenced President Thomas Jefferson to establish the US Military Academy at West Point, New York, in 1802. The USMA originally was created to train Artillerists and Engineers.

After Hamilton had supported Thomas Jefferson for president instead of Aaron Burr, opposed Burr’s candidacy for governor of New York and allegedly made disparaging remarks about Burr’s character, Aaron Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel. In 1804, Burr mortally wounded Alexander Hamilton.

The “Hamilton Battery,” D Battery, 5th Artillery Battalion (D/5th Artillery) is still in the US Army Field Artillery today as part of the 1st Battalion, 5th Field Artillery, 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Riley, Kansas. It follows a proud tradition.

(Information in this article came from the article “Alexander Hamilton, Artilleryman” by Lieutenant Colonel Walter H. Smith, FA, in the 1929 Field Artillery Journal, Pages 610-623.)



General Washington crossed the Delaware River and took the Hessians by surprise and, with the help of the deadly effects of Hamilton’s Battery, defeated them, attaining his first victory in the Revolutionary War. *Courtesy of the US Army Center of Military History*